



ational Council of

Women of Canada

(7)

Our First Annual Meeting

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ALIGHT, airy hall, hung with Union Jacks, and the platform gay with flowers, whose perfume filled the air. Bright women's faces, full of intelligence and enthusiastic interest. A fair sprinkling of men, whose number grew larger as the day wore on; men whose close attention, and whose regular attendance throughout the session, bespoke the interest they also felt in this new organization of women workers. Young women and older ones; those to whom co-operative work on organized plans was a novelty, and those also whose lives, for many years, have been devoted to efforts for the world's welfare; Jewish and Gentile; Roman Catholics and those of other creeds; philanthropist and artist; literary women, and missionary workers, together with those whose life work lies within home walls—was ever such a truly representative gathering

of Canadian women as that which assembled in the Convention Hall of the Normal School in Ottawa last week, at the first annual meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada!

The large ball-room out at Government House had been the scene of two smaller gatherings on the previous day, both of which were unique in its history, I think, and both of which will be of interest to Canadian women at large.

The first of these gatherings was the meeting of the Executive Committee of this National Council, and seated round the large table in the centre of the room were the Presidents of each of the Local Councils, and of the nationally organized Societies who have joined the Federation, together with the General Officers, all presided over by the woman who already has made herself dear to Canadian hearts, and to whose wonderful enthusiasm, self-sacrifice, and great natural ability the rapid growth of the Council is due—the Countess of Aberdeen.

A very business-like gathering, truly, where motions were weighed, resolutions considered, and the final arrangements for the public meetings were discussed with a regard to Parliamentary rules, that would have delighted Dr. Bourinot himself, had he been fortunate enough to have been admitted. Yes, very business-like, as I have said, and yet very womanly withal, for, I tell you privately, and in the strictest secrecy,

of course, that meeting did not adjourn without the inevitable cup of tea.

If the first gathering of that day was for business, the second was certainly for pleasure, for when the Executive Committee met again, in that same room, a wonderful change had taken place, in outward appearances at least. No longer was the table covered with blotting pads and programmes, inkstands and resolutions, but it had stretched out its long length in hospitable fashion, and its surface shone resplendent with snowy linen, sparkling crystal, fruits, silver and all the other accessories of a richly appointed dining-table—for this was a dinner party, given to the members of the Executive Committee by their Excellencies.

Big bowls of creamy-white roses, mixed with maiden-hair ferns, stood about the table between the dishes of candied fruits and confections, and here and there sprays of delicate asparagus fern were laid lightly upon the cloth. The pretty menu cards were hand-painted, and represented a winter scene outside Government House, with a group of autumn-tinted maple leaves in one corner. Beside each plate was a French cracker, daintily tied with narrow ribbons of the Council's colors—dark and light blue.

If I had not so much else to tell you this week, I should try to give you a pen picture of the guests, and of their costumes, but I must forbear, and will only

say that the gowns were handsome and becoming, and bore not the slightest family likeness to the outward garb supposed to be affected by the typical strong-minded women. Nor can I tell you anything of the menu—because it would take too long.

The men guests (among whom were Judge Routhier, of Quebec, and the Rev. Manly Benson) seemed to enjoy themselves as much as did the women, and indeed it would have been strange if they had not done so, for the dullness and weariness that usually characterize large dinners were only conspicuous by their absence. One toast only was drunk, and that was "Her Gracious Majesty," proposed by his Excellency the Governor-General.

And now, having digressed so far, let me ask you to return with me to the scene with which I began this article, and to listen reverently, as did the audience, while her Excellency, the President, reminds them, in sweet, earnest words, of their dependence upon God's blessing in the work that lies before them, and asks each one to spend a few solemn minutes in silent prayer, asking in the way best suited to individual needs for help and wisdom in all that might come before them.

I hope, some time soon, you may all have the pleasure of reading the address in full with which her Excellency opened the meeting of the Council, but in the meantime I have jotted down some extracts for

your special benefit, because they give the key-note, as it were, to all that followed.

After saying a few words concerning her own feeling of responsibility, as President of such a Council, her Excellency continued :—

“We come together as women who are more or less alive to the high duties and opportunities which are ours in virtue of our being women. . . .

“And how can we best describe this woman’s mission in a word? Can we not best describe it as ‘mothering,’ in one sense or another? We are not all called to be the mothers of little children, but every woman is called on to ‘mother’ in some way or another. And it is impossible to overlook what a great work of ‘mothering’ in a special sense is committed to the women of Canada.

“It is one of the great glories of this country that its people are all workers, and that there are few drones. Its sons are all engrossed in the battle of life, striving for themselves and their dear ones, and therefore it is on the women, hard worked as they too are, will devolve the duty of building up the homes of the nation in the truest sense, by helping with single-minded disinterestedness in however humble a way ; homes where love, mutual forbearance and consideration is the common rule, and the spirit of self-sacrifice is accounted the first necessity in the glorious work of helping others ; homes which open kindly doors of

welcome to the strangers which come in numbers to this land, and which keep alive within them a high ideal of the pure and holy family life which is the chief strength of all nations."

" . . . And I trust and pray that this Council, which is now assembled for the first time, may be able to forge a mighty bond of union between us all in arousing us to service, and to the thought of our duty in caring for others, of striving to act towards all who come within our influence in the spirit of our Father's love, who thinks of all, whose loving-kindness is over all His works. It is to further the appreciation of the golden rule that our Council has been formed. . . ."

"I am very sure that our hearts are full of thankfulness to Him this morning for the way by which He has led us so far ; for the fellow workers He has given us ; for the guidance and the blessing which He has vouchsafed during the perilous and difficult times of organization."

After a brief allusion to the difficulties, mistakes and discouragements that are sure to try the courage and patience of those who strive to further the objects they have at heart, Lady Aberdeen closed her address with the following beautiful lines of Clough :—

"Say not the struggle nought availeth,
The labor and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not nor faileth,
And as things have been, they remain.

“For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making
Comes silent flooding in the main.

“And not through eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward look, the land is bright!”

It was almost superfluous, in a sense, for Lady Ritchie and Mrs. Scott to present addresses of welcome to the Delegates on behalf of their hostesses, the members of the Ottawa Local Council, for verily the air itself seemed laden with welcome, and sure it is that Toronto must look well to her laurels when the National Council visits her next year, that at least they may be received no less warmly than they were in the seat of Government. Besides private hospitality without stint and Government House entertainments, the Street Railway Company tendered a ride round the city to the visitors, and some kind and thoughtful citizen supplied souvenirs to each one in the shape of a beautifully illustrated descriptive booklet of Ottawa and its chief attractions. The Vice-President, for Ontario, Mrs. MacDonell of Sunnyside, on behalf of the Delegates responded to the kindly greetings of which I have spoken, and her words were applauded to the echo by those for whom she spoke.

The Secretary's report outlined the growth of the Council from its inception at the close of the Inter-

national Congress of Women in Chicago last May, until the present time, when it consists of the following Local Councils (composed of federated Societies) as follows in the order of organization :—

TORONTO—Organized November 3, 1893, 24 Federated Societies.

HAMILTON—Organized November 17th, 1893, 25 Federated Societies.

MONTREAL—Organized November 30, 1893, 32 Federated Societies.

OTTAWA—Organized January 17, 1894, 27 Federated Societies.

LONDON—Organized February 14, 1894, 12 Federated Societies.

QUEBEC—Organized April 3, 1894.

Added to these are three nationally organized Societies, namely, "The Woman's Art Association of Canada," "The Dominion Girls' Friendly Society," and "The Dominion Woman's Enfranchisement Association."

The rest of the first morning session was devoted to brief reports, presented with a promptness and clearness that was quite refreshing.

The afternoon session was devoted to a public conference, and, under three sections, three ten minute papers were given, each section being followed by a twenty minute discussion. The papers were grouped under the following headings :—

SECTION I.

"Co-operation in work, and its advantages," which comprised "Co-operation on a General Basis," by Mrs. Ashley Carus-Wilson, Montreal, read in her absence by Mrs. Sutherland Taylor; and "Co-operation as shown in Associated Charities," by Mrs. George Drummond, Montreal; and an address upon "Co-operation of Working Women for Protective Purposes," by her Excellency the President.

SECTION II.

Dealt in four papers with "Woman's Clubs and Their Benefits," Miss Shenick of Ottawa, speaking for "Literary Clubs," Madame Dandurand of Montreal for "Social Clubs," Mrs. George Papps of Hamilton for "Musical Clubs," and Mrs. Dignam, of the Woman's Art Association, for "Art Clubs."

SECTION III.

"The Relation of Parents and Children, and its Responsibilities," called forth three excellent papers, which were afterwards fully discussed. They were the following:—"The Training of Young Children," by a skilled kindergartener, Miss Laidlaw of London (read by Mrs. Boomer); "How to Retain Home Influence Over Growing up Boys and Girls," by a member of The Toronto Council (read by Mrs. Grant Macdonald): "Difficult Children, and How to Understand Them," by Mrs. Frechette, Ottawa.

"Those papers have been an inspiration to me," said one of the mothers, afterwards. "If the Council never did anything else than make such Conferences possible, its work would produce widespread results for good."

That evening Lord and Lady Aberdeen received about one thousand guests at Government House, standing and shaking hands with all.

"Lady Aberdeen is the first vice-regal lady who has ever done so. I do not see how she can stand so much fatigue," remarked an Ottawa matron to me, during the evening. "Others have always taken seats on the dais, after a few guests have been received, and if you wanted to speak to them you had to go up to where they sat."

Gay gowns and flashing jewels, laughter and quiet conversations, music and refreshments, happy women and gallant men—so one might sum up the evening. If I cannot tell you what songs were sung, or give you any details of the organ recital in the Chapel, it is only because my time, that evening, was chiefly spent in trying to enlighten, first a worthy Senator, and next a brilliant newspaper man, concerning the design and objects of the National Council itself.

In the first case I soon discovered that a suspicion had been entertained that "it was all politics."

"But Lady Thompson and Madame Laurier have both been elected Vice-Presidents, and therefore poli-

tics would be rather an awkward subject to discuss," I said.

"Well, if it isn't politics, will you tell me what you are at?" quoth he.

"For one thing, we are going to try and get our children taught to use their hands as well as their brains in the public schools, so that the girls, at least, may have some idea of how to cook and do house-work in a scientific manner."

"That's a good idea ; but how do you hope to bring the school trustees to agree to it?"

"By trying to get every woman in the country to see the need of it, talk it up, create public sentiment, and the rest is sure to follow."

"May you be successful, then, in your undertaking."

The newspaper man was not so quickly won over, naturally, for he believed in the power of the press more than in the power of woman, to bring about needed reforms. Moreover, as he afterwards confessed, his wife had told him beforehand that "it was all fads," and of course he believed his wife.

However, he is a staunch believer in "Canada for the Canadians," and in the desirability of the abolition of race prejudices, and when he found that, for the first time, French and English women were working together in Montreal and Quebec, he also began to think, "it might be a good thing after all!"

Refreshments were served in the winter tennis court, in which, on such occasions, a large red and white marquee is lowered from the roof, forming a brilliantly-lighted supper-room, that makes one think of summer gatherings out-of-doors.

In spite of the late hours the night before, the morning session on the second day began promptly on time, the first resolution to be considered being one bearing on the fostering of patriotism, and calling for a better history of Canada for our schools, in which accurate maps of the Dominion should be placed.

This resolution came from the Ottawa Local Council, and was proposed by Miss Harmon, with earnest words of endorsation from other speakers. The need of female inspectors in factories and work-shops where women are employed ; the need for the appointment of police matrons for gaols and prisons ; the desirability of manual training for children in the public schools, (proposed by Mrs. Hoodless, of Hamilton); were all dwelt upon and discussed at length, and it was decided to ask the Local Councils to work for the accomplishment of these objects in their various cities during the coming year.

Mrs. Grant Macdonald, as President of the Toronto Local Council, tendered an invitation, in the name of her Council, asking that the next annual meeting of the National Council be held in this city. Madame

Routhier, on behalf of the Quebec Council, said they had hoped to have the next meeting, but were quite willing to give way to Toronto, provided that their time might come the following year, and the Toronto invitation was, therefore, accepted unanimously.

The principle of "peace and arbitration," rather than war, was also heartily endorsed by the Council.

The conference in the afternoon was very largely attended, and his Excellency the Governor-General and Lieutenant-Governor Schultz, of Manitoba, occupied seats on the platform, and were evidently appreciative listeners to all that went on. In the galleries, also, were many prominent men, as well as ladies.

As before, the subjects discussed were grouped under three general headings :—

SECTION I.

"Woman's Work in Connection with Social Reforms," included "Preventive Work," by Mrs. S. G. Wood, of the Girls' Friendly Society; "Rescue Work," by Madame Routhier, of Quebec (read in French); "Temperance Work," by Mrs. Day-Smith, Hamilton.

SECTION II.

"Woman's Work in Connection with the Sick," was treated under the following subdivisions: "Hospital Nursing," by Miss Harris, of Hamilton; "Nursing of the Poor in Their Own Homes," by Mrs. Tilley,

of London ; and "Emergency, or 'First Aid to the Injured' Lectures," by Mrs. Hodgins, of Toronto (read by Mrs. Helliwell).

At the conclusion of the latter paper Mrs. Helliwell showed a very useful bandage, which has been largely adopted of late. That its usefulness might be better understood, the President called Lady Marjorie Gordon to the platform that she might personate the "injured victim," while Mrs. Helliwell deftly adjusted the bandage to her head, her hand, her arm, and her chest.

SECTION III.

This section provoked more discussion and a wider diversity of opinion than any other that had been before the meeting, as might be expected, for the subject is one of personal moment to the average housekeeper. It was none other than "The Problem of Domestic Service," and it was treated "From the Mistress' Point of view" by Mrs. Boomer of London, "From the Servants' point of view" by Mrs. Helliwell ; and Dr. Emily Stowe cleverly suggested "How the Problem May be Solved" by means of technical training, mutual sympathy and forbearance.

Mrs. Boomer's paper contained an allusion to a famous portrait of "A Faithful Servant" of the olden times on a wall in St. Cross Hospital, Winchester, a copy of which was exhibited, and created no little

amusement. This astonishing creature had a pig's snout, to indicate that he was not to be dainty ; his jaw was padlocked, to show that he could keep secrets ; he had hind's feet, to show that he would be quick to serve ; he held a sword in his left hand, to indicate that he would protect his master's goods, while his right hand was left free to work ; he had also an ass' ears, the significance of which I have forgotten, unfortunately.

In the discussion that followed the reading of these papers, Madame Dandurand, of Montreal, voiced the difficulties encountered by many French mistresses in that city in so pathetic a manner that she secured the sympathy of at least a portion of the audience.

The last meeting of the Council was held in the evening, and the platform contained about an equal number of men and women, for the former had come in order that they might publicly endorse the formation of a National Council of Women of Canada. A resolution to that effect was proposed by his Excellency the Governor-General, who spoke in eloquent words of the benefits that would be gained by such a federation. This resolution was seconded by Sir John Thompson, who said that he felt it to be a matter of personal congratulation "that the first Parliament of Women" should be convened while he was Prime Minister, and afterwards alluded in playful terms to the fact that the Woman's Parliament had been able to consider

intelligently and carefully at least twenty-one subjects in two days, while "the brother Parliament on the hill" were still arguing the one matter that had been before them for a much longer time. The utter rashness with which Sir John Thompson promised to give his help in any matters that the Council might bring before him was fairly startling, until one remembered that the making of promises is perhaps hereditary in the office he holds.

That the Hon. W. Laurier was unable to be present (as had been expected), was a very great disappointment, for every one was looking forward to hearing "the silver-tongued orator." The other speakers of the evening were His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, Rev. Principal Grant, Rev. Archdeacon Lauder, Rev. Manly Benson and Judge Routhier, of Quebec, all of whom spoke in terms of sympathy and congratulation.

The closing address by her Excellency the President was unanimously declared by the Delegates and others to be the best of the many good addresses she has given since she has come to Canada. That she was proud of the success of the meetings, of the literary ability displayed in the papers which had been read, of the order and spirit of good will that had prevailed throughout the meetings, she very frankly stated, nor did she hesitate to say that she felt very

proud of being the first President of the National Council of Women of Canada.

Mrs. Schultz, of Manitoba, and Mrs. Drummond, of Montreal (both great favorites with the delegates), then moved and seconded a vote of hearty thanks to the speakers, but when his Excellency the Governor-General, on behalf of the Delegates, rose to move a vote of thanks to the President, he was promptly ruled "out of order" by the Chair—the only ruling that the meeting felt disposed to question.

A beautiful basket of flowers had been presented to her Excellency from the Executive Committee, earlier in the evening.

A verse of the National Anthem was then sung, and so closed the first Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada.

On the following day, Sectional Conferences were held in various rooms in the Normal School, by "The King's Daughters," "The Humane Society," "The Dominion Woman's Enfranchisement Association," "The Montreal Morning Musicales," and "The Girls' Friendly Society," all of which were well attended. The Executive Committee also met and transacted some routine business. A deputation of some of the Delegates was received by them, who desired that audible prayer should take the place of silent prayer at the opening of meetings of the Council. Her Excellency explained that the matter must first be

brought before the various Local Councils and Nationally Affiliated Societies before any decision could be made. It was also decided to ask the Local Councils to co-operate with the Children's Aid Society in trying to secure separate imprisonment and trial for young offenders, especially for those who are arrested for the first time.

The announcement that his Excellency the Governor-General, his Honor the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, and the Honorable Senator Sanford of Hamilton, desired to become life patrons, and that Mrs. Frank Gibbs of Port Arthur, and Mrs. Drummond of Montreal had become annual patrons, was received with unbounded applause.

"What sort of work is the National Council going to do?" a man asked a Delegate, after she returned home.

"Just 'mothering,'" she answered.

And she was right, was she not? For surely to care for the welfare of factory women, for the better teaching of the children in our schools, for those who are sick or in prison, for our homes, and for our little ones—surely motherly instincts, motherly courage, motherly patience, and motherly wisdom will all be needed for such work as this.

Will the world approve? Possibly not. But with the promise in remembrance of One who has said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these,

my brethren, ye have done it unto Me," the members of the National Council of Canada may well re-echo the words inscribed over the gate of Aberdeen University, and quoted in her closing address by their President, "They say. What say they? Let them say."

SAMA.



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m.d.